

Five Women Called

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Muncie, Indiana**

April 2017

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2017

SPColl
Undergrad
Thesis
LD
2489
.24
2017
.M39

Abstract

The United Methodist Church has given women full clergy rights since 1956. Yet many members of the Methodist Church have never experienced a clergywoman leading them. In addition, people who consider themselves Methodists may have not considered what scripture has to say about women leading in the church, even if they have been led by one. This project came out of my own experience with clergywomen and the minimal information I had about what scripture said about women in these roles. I interviewed four women who are serving or have served as pastors of United Methodist Churches regarding their call to ministry and their experience as clergywomen. This was not only to attempt to understand these women and their experiences, but to gain insight from women who have been in a similar place as I discern my own call into ministry.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Paul Ranieri for advising me through this project. His guidance and interest in learning alongside me was immensely helpful throughout this project.

I would also like to thank the four women who I interviewed for sharing a part of their story with me and inspiring me to live into the call God has for my life, wherever that may be, along with Russ Abel for connecting me with each of them.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, with a variety of beliefs regarding what scripture has to say about women in ministry, for encouraging me to seek out truth and listening, as I work through my own beliefs, in a caring and nonjudgmental way. You all have made it possible for me to begin relying on God for guidance and releasing my fears of letting others down or creating conflict by living out my call.

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Process Analysis Statement

I was interested in the view of the United Methodist Church on women in Ministry and in the history of women's role in the church, but I didn't want to just do research and write about what other people had to say. I wanted to hear from those actually doing it what it's like to be a female pastor: the challenges they have overcome, the joys of working in ministry, the things they have to continue to work through, and the ways they have been encouraged to keep doing so. There's something to be said for history of doctrine and the traditions of the church that have been adapted, but they are worth much less if we don't acknowledge the ways in which they are actually carried out and affect people.

I did my own research on the Methodist Church before going into these interviews to have an understanding and address some of the concerns I have myself about what scripture had to say. This was a lot of information to wade through and I was anxious to move forward and speak with a primary source rather than read online what people had to say. As I interviewed each of these women it became clear to me that their backgrounds played a huge part in how things played out in their ministry and in each of their stories it was clear that the only way things could have come together in this way was God moving. This also allowed me to see the ways in which my own background has made an impact on my experience with this call so far.

My plan for the actual layout of this thesis changed along the way, because as I talked to these women and understood aspects of my own background better it began to feel less like research and more like 5 stories: these 4 women's and my own connections and experiences weaved through them. My own research beforehand helped me to come into these interviews in the right frame of mind, but as far as presenting it, the goal became to set the context for these stories rather than tell its own. This was the least structured, most evolving project I have ever taken part in, but because of the stress of all of that I have grown immensely and am much more proud of the result.

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My Story

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Being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean that you have taken time to form an opinion about whether or not women should be pastors, but when you are a woman feeling a call into ministry it's something you think about. The United Methodist Church has given women full clergy rights since 1956. There is a really interesting history behind it because of the splitting up and combining of denominations that has happened. Because of this, things don't boil down as nicely into "this is when the conversation was had and a decision was reached about women being pastors". However, for the last 61 years women have had full rights, the same rights as men in pastoral roles.¹

So, in some ways it's kind of old news within this denomination, until it affects you. Growing up in the United Methodist Church I had a female pastor for 9 years of my childhood and I never really thought anything of it. My family began attending Saint Joseph United Methodist in Fort Wayne, IN before I was born. So, I have spent all of my 21 years being involved and then a member of this church. I had friends in my high school who were Catholic. So, I knew that the Catholic Church doesn't allow women to be priests, but I didn't know about other Protestant denominations enough to know they don't all agree and I hadn't given much thought to why. I can remember one Sunday school class in my home church just after I graduated high school where we talked about this being a controversy in many churches. One class out of all those years of going there and I left it not really understanding how those verses that say "women should be silent in church" and "a woman should not have authority over a man" fit in with everything else I knew about following Christ and serving him.

¹ for more information about the history of women within the UMC and related denominations a timeline is available on the UMC website: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>

That is not to say my church was bad or that we didn't talk about important things; this just wasn't a popular conversation to have and I don't fault them for that, because it's hard to understand and wrap our minds around. This class came years after I had, myself, felt a call into ministry and I was not ready at the time to really study these scriptures because I was afraid they would mean I was wrong about being called. So, I just didn't. I left that class and didn't think about it again until I came to Ball State for my bachelor's degree and got involved in Cru.

Cru is a movement passionate about knowing Jesus and telling his story by getting, giving, and multiplying the gospel. It is present on college campuses all over the U.S. and overseas, and is an interdenominational movement. For the first time I was in community with other Christians who weren't Methodists (aside from my few friends in high school who were Catholic). I loved it. I thought it was great that we came from all of these different backgrounds and could learn from each other and hear other perspectives. I loved this opportunity, but I began to see how many of these people that I grew to care about and respect a lot didn't think that it was scriptural for women to be pastors. So, I began to question it myself.

We kept talking about how we have these different views of certain things among denominations and how there are central truths that you have to believe to be a Christian and others that people have varied opinions on and are still Christians regardless of which side they fall on. One of these truths was that all of scripture is God breathed. I thought I believed that, but what about these verses that my church seemed to ignore. I knew I was a Christian, and I knew my parents are and my pastor is and the people I look up to at my church at home are, but there seemed to be a disconnect here.

I was afraid of what I would find, but eventually I dove into these problematic passages anyway and tried to figure out what was really going on. I found that the context of these verses matter. They

are in Paul's letters to the early church and some people read them as instructions for the church indefinitely while others read them as instructions for those specific churches, which we should look to for guidance, while also considering the situation and whether it is relevant now. I found some peace in that, but I also understood both sides of the argument which put me in a tough place of what to believe and what it meant for my faith and my career.

Two verses of scripture seemed especially problematic to me at first and in looking more closely at them they have become sources of encouragement to me and motivation to study scripture. The first of these is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must remain in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (New International Version) I know what you're thinking, "How in the world could that be encouraging to a woman who feels called into ministry?" Well, the notes in my study bible put these verses into perspective and lead to a more full understanding of Paul's purpose for them.

Does this mean that women should not speak in church services today? It is clear from [1 Corinthians] 11:5 that women prayed and prophesied in public worship. It is also clear in chapters 12-14 that women are given spiritual gifts and are encouraged to exercise them in the body of Christ. Women have much to contribute and can participate in worship services. In the Corinthian church, women were not allowed to confront men in public. Apparently some of the women who had become Christians thought that their Christian freedom gave them the right to question the men in public worship. This was causing division in the church. In addition, women of that day did not receive formal religious education as did the men. Women may have been raising questions in the worship

services that could have been answered at home without disturbing the services. Paul was asking the women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. The purpose of Paul's words was to promote unity, not to teach about women's role in the church.

The second of these verses is 1 Timothy 2:11-12: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." While this again may seem like a straightforward command in scripture for men to be the only ones eligible to lead in the church, it is helpful to put it in context. First off, Paul does not forbid women from ever teaching. He speaks highly of Priscilla (Acts 18: 24-26), Phoebe (Romans 16:1), Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:6, 12), and Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2). These women were all leaders in the church and Paul had no problem with them. So, it is much more likely that he was prohibiting the Ephesian women, not all women, from teaching in this verse. But why would these women be given this instruction? He did not want them teaching because they didn't have enough knowledge or experience to lead the church well. This church had a problem with false teachers and the women were especially susceptible to them (1 Timothy 3:1-9). They did not have enough biblical knowledge yet to discern the truth because they weren't allowed to study scripture at all until recently. Paul encourages them to learn in verse 11, he just asks that they do so in a respectful manner, and he wants the church to be led well. So, he doesn't allow these women, who know very little about the Bible, to be leaders of the church.

This new view on these verses has led me to be extremely motivated to read scripture and try to more fully understand what God has for us within it. I have been more committed to reading my bible since understanding these verses in context than I ever have been before and I praise God for that.

There is one other section of scripture that is often referenced to say that women should not have positions of authority in the church. It is just one chapter over in 1 Timothy 3. Instructions to Timothy on Overseers and Deacons are outlined here. A list of characteristics and standards are listed to be applied to those in leadership positions. Overseers are discussed, always with a masculine pronoun, then Deacons are mentioned and told to also be men worthy of respect, etc. Verse 11 is where things get interesting. "In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything." (1 Timothy 3:11) Some versions interpret "wives" to be "deaconesses" and can also mean wives of deacons or female leaders of the church (such as Phoebe in Romans). This has led many churches to allow women to be deaconesses today, but a deacon is not quite the same as a pastor. Overseer is probably more like what we would consider a pastor to be today. The fact that the distinction is made that women can be deaconesses, but not overseers is a little troubling.

To be completely honest this is the one passage that still has me pretty confused. I don't feel that I fully understand the reasoning for these distinctions, the way it is written, but I also don't see it as straightforward enough to convince me I am scripturally not allowed to be a pastor because of my gender. It is possible that the specific restrictions of the Ephesian women have carried over into this chapter as well. These verses are a source of encouragement to me as well as they give, even these women, who are just now able to read scripture, a place to serve in the church as a helper. I would like to say I was 100% confident in saying whether the pronouns of these verses are for everyone or the just the Ephesian women of the time, but the truth is I'm not, because they aren't as clear.

This is the understanding I had coming into my senior year at Ball State and making a decision on the topic for my honors thesis. All things considered, women in ministry seemed like the perfect topic for this project. I saw it as an opportunity to do this research I had been meaning to set aside time for (and I received credit for it). It made it easier for me to spend time not working on other things, because

it was also a part of my degree. But I didn't just want to do a normal research paper, I wanted to actually talk to people: women with experience being called and responding.

I asked my pastor at home if he knew of any women who would be good for me to talk to and willing to let me interview them and he was probably more excited than I was. He gave me a list of names and I began contacting them. I didn't know what to expect because he didn't really tell me anything about these women other than their names and that they either were serving as pastors now or did at one time. I expected information from them that might help me wrap my mind around this call of mine, advice even of how I should move forward or what to expect as a pastor. That isn't exactly what I got, but what I did get was much better.

We are all such different women, from different backgrounds and experiences, different personalities, but I related to them on so many levels. I asked them each the exact same list of questions² and yet the conversations went so differently. There were so many of the things they said that touched on all of the concerns I have. There were also some things I couldn't relate to, but I'm sure someone can. I thought about summarizing these interviews into the things that stood out or seemed relevant to me, but as I experienced them I realized the connections were worth more than the information. I learned so much from these women, but summarizing their words into what I got out of them would be a disservice to anyone else hoping to learn from and relate to their stories. So I decided to transcribe them and let you connect to them yourself.

To anyone considering a call to ministry, especially women, I pray that these interviews would be helpful to you in discerning God's call.

² Questions listed in Appendix A

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Meet the Women behind the Ministry

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Aleze Fulbright

Rev. Dr. Aleze Michelle Fulbright is a 41 year old native of Tulsa, Oklahoma. She received her Masters in Divinity from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. She also has an earned Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Leadership from Houston Graduate School of Theology. Aleze is an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, where she currently serves the Indiana Conference as the Director of Leadership Development. Prior to her current appointment, Aleze served in the North Texas Conference in a host of ministry settings, as the Associate Director of Leadership Development, the Associate Pastor at First United Methodist-Commerce and Campus Minister for Wesleyan Campus Ministry at Texas A&M University-Commerce. Dr. Aleze's joys in life are her son Myron Fisher Jr. who attends Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, on academic and athletic scholarship, studying Secondary Education and playing Basketball. She enjoys fellowshiping with family and friends, in addition to connecting with community through her sorority involvement. Above all else, Dr. Aleze has a passion for empowering people to recognize and live out their God-giveness with purpose.

Jen Gibbs

Jenifer Stuelpe Gibbs is a second career pastor serving in an urban ministry setting on the east side of Indianapolis, Indiana. This is her tenth year of vocational ministry at the age of 45.

Jill Howard

Rev. Jill Howard, 34, is originally from Knoxville, TN. She is a graduate of Butler University and Candler School of Theology. She has been serving United Methodist Churches since 2008, and will be senior pastor of Rosedale Hills United Methodist Church starting in July, 2017. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, theater, singing, and being with her husband, Corey, and son, Xavier.

Ann Glass

Rev. Dr. Ann L. Glass is a retired United Methodist pastor who served 31 years in active ministry within the State of Indiana. She has served small country congregations and large churches in Indianapolis and Columbus. She had the honor of becoming the first female District Superintendent in the State of Indiana and served in that position from 1987-1993, again from 1997-2000, and for one year during the State's transition from two to one conferences. Ann's Bachelors Degree was earned at the University of Guam. Her Master of Divinity was from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, her Doctor of Ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL. Ann received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Indianapolis. Ann enjoys reading, quilting, collecting antiques, and knitting. She has a heart for hospitality and introducing others to the love of God. Ann is married to Bill who is an avid reader and book collector. They have two grown sons and one granddaughter.

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Aleze Fulbright Interview

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This was the first of my interviews and I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect, or even who to be looking for, because we were meeting at Concannon's in Muncie. There was really no need to be concerned. Aleze was encouraging and friendly and by the end of the interview I felt much more comfortable not only talking to her, but in moving forward with these interviews.

Brooke Mayer: So, how long have you been working in ministry?

Aleze Fulbright: I acknowledged my call to ministry in 2001, and have been in full-time vocational pastoral ministry since 2008. In my former life I was an accountant. From the time I was in middle school all through high school even going into college I was going to be an accountant and I was going to be a CEO of a major company and that was my path for life. That was what I was going to do, and then moving to Dallas after undergrad and getting really involved in a faith community I just sensed that God was calling me to something more. But yet I didn't want to say it was ministry because women can't do that. That was my thought. That was my upbringing. I think God has a sense of humor. So, when I moved to Dallas after undergrad I started attending a church that was led by a female pastor. It was like, what? That doesn't happen. She really had an impact on my life because she showed me how to be 'female' and how to be 'leader'. What I had seen formerly was different. The women that I had seen previously in ministry were trying to emulate kind of the male and masculine images. Which for me wasn't me; it's not who I am authentically. But having that pastor showing me how to be 'female' and how to be 'leader' really opened my eyes and expanded my understanding of what pastoral leadership could be for females. Then the United Methodist Church, they moved her, and then another female came, and it was

like, really? That's when I really started to embrace this and say, okay, God is calling me to something more.

BM: Did you receive any backlash from family or close friends when you let them know that you were considering going into ministry? And if so, how did things play out and how did it affect you?

AF: The guy that I was dating at the time, his faith community didn't believe in women in ministry. So, that was what I like to call a crisis of call because I was "in love with him" or whatever and he was very adamant in saying, no. Women can't do this and she can't make more than me, and she can't be in ministry. So, I wrestled for a while with that and finally I just had to say "I got to go with God". So, we ended that relationship.

It has been challenging, particularly in my family. My dad still doesn't believe in females in ministry and I've been in this thing for almost 10 years, right? So, it's still hard to kind of reconcile that. He's never heard me preach. He wasn't at my ordination. He wasn't at my doctoral graduation. So, it's still a wrestling, but I always say, 'I'm going with God'. However it works out, I have to trust God through this process. I've lost friends, and that. There's that romanticized side of ministry that people think, 'oh, if you say yes everything is going to be unicorns and rainbows'. No, it's not. I mean it's quite fulfilling to know that you're living a life of purpose and you're being an influence and impact on behalf of God, but there is the real human side of it. You know? You have to reconcile within yourself that, 'I'm really doing this because of God'. If people fall and people don't come along to join with you, you have to have peace in that and trust that God will provide those others to come by your side and supplement that. I have been really fortunate in that.

BM: Are there passages in scripture that were concerning to you when it came to your call?

AF: So, growing up not understanding that women could be that, regularly hearing the Galatian household codes that women are just supposed to be quiet in church and not speak and even

understanding scripture from a masculine perspective, that we identify God as He a lot, I think that has been very formative for me a lot. I couldn't see myself in that role. After attending seminary and of course my experiences it's like pssh, yes I can, and I will.

BM: Has your understanding of these passages changed over time?

AF: Most definitely.

BM How would you say that that has happened?

AF: More so from understanding the context in which the scriptures were formulated and also shared, understanding who the writers were, which were male, and understanding how females were not valued, they were more property, then. Coming to understand the context of scripture and how it relates to ministry has been very liberating for me and I am a cheerleader and a champion for liberating others from that mindset, that ignorance. I call it ignorance, and ignorance is not a bad thing it's just that you don't know. Yeah, I'm a cheerleader and a champion to rid people of ignorance.

BM: Did you choose to enter this denomination because it aligned with the beliefs you hold about scripture, tradition, etc. or were there other reasons you became involved in the Methodist church?

AF: Growing up I was in a different expression of the Methodist Church called the CME (Christian Methodist Episcopal) Church. So, it's more of an African American tradition. In that tradition there wasn't female leadership or anything like that. When I went off to college I was some of everything. I tried every denomination underneath the sun, even non-denoms. I think after graduation from undergrad and moving to Dallas I was really looking for home to help nurture my faith and then this female pastor she was on the radio, the secular radio, talking about church and different things like that. So there was just this connection like, who is this woman? So I went there, it was a United Methodist Church by chance and then just began learning more about the United Methodist Church. I totally

aligned myself with the United Methodist Church when I saw our understanding of grace, God's grace for all of us, and also our understanding of communion, that all are welcome. I mean, there are still bumps in the road within the United Methodist Church that I don't necessarily favor, but yet I feel that somehow we'll come around. We have grace and also our understanding that all are welcome at the table. So, we'll see.

BM: Do you feel that the decision to ordain women is one that all denominations should make? Why or why not?

AF: I don't feel that it should be a decision, I feel it should be . . . you do it. I don't think it's necessarily [something that] should come before a board or . . . even become a discussion. I think about the passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 it says that God who calls is faithful. So who are we to put God in a box, to define who can and cannot be called for all people? So I don't feel it's a decision. If a person feels strongly that God is tugging at their hearts to be able to live a life of full-time ministry, vocational ministry, why isn't that a thing? And if they have gone through the necessary steps in order to affirm that call and to articulate that call it's not for me to put God in a box and say who can and cannot be called into ministry. That's not my role. My role is to affirm, and encourage, and equip, and to send forth. So, it shouldn't be a decision, it should be what we're doing. Period.

BM: Is conflict over the ordination of women something you encounter often?

AF: I don't think within our United Methodist tradition. I don't think that's a challenge, but then when I go into more Baptist Churches and knowing that I have a lot of degrees and have proven myself faithful and sometimes get relegated to a side podium and I can't come onto the platform to preach that angers me. I have learned over the years that it is okay to say no to those types of engagements. They want me to come for 'Women's Day' but yet I'm unable to speak from the platform or have that authority as a pastor or pastoral leader. So, I'm learning to say, 'No thank you'. That's not who I am, and I can't not be

myself. I'm really living into this authenticity of who I am and of this call. So, if those engagements don't align with my authenticity then I have to say no. That's hard, because you want to be able when opportunities come to preach and to proclaim the good news, but if it doesn't align, then it's okay to say no. I've had to say no, to some very lucrative opportunities, but they didn't align. If it don't align I can't do it because then I'm not being authentically me and I don't feel that I'm giving the Gospel message justice if I can't be who God is calling me to be.

BM: Within the United Methodist Church, do you feel you are treated differently than male pastors?

AF: I think that because of my level of leadership I don't feel that there is a difference. However, I know there are other colleagues where pay is a disparity, also where many are unable to assume leadership responsibilities in large congregations because congregations are not ready for a woman. So, while I don't feel that I am treated differently I know there are many that are. Particularly my sisters of color that are female, there are limits to that as well. So, I'm very fortunate, but I don't take that fortune for granted. I have to speak up and speak out for those that may not have a voice and to show others the possibility of what could be different. Be it female, be it a person of color, whatever. I've been given this platform for a reason, so I can't remain silent.

BM: Do you see differences in treatment mainly coming from members of the congregation, fellow pastors or outside the church?

AF: I think some congregations are just not ready and a lot of it has to do with influences both inside and outside the church. I know of a situation in Texas where a clergy sister was appointed to a large membership congregations. So the announcement was made, some of the church members were excited, some were not. Then it got into the community that a woman was coming to lead this large membership congregation and it became the talk of the community in such a hate filled way to where the cabinet had to rescind that appointment because it would not have been healthy for the

clergywoman and her family to come into that situation. So, I think we, as a conference, and also a denomination, must become more proactive in preparing congregations for female leadership. So, if an appointment, because a person's gifts and graces align with that congregation, it's a fit and she so happens to be female, then we need to begin doing some of the groundwork to unearth some of those biases and prejudices before the clergyperson is there so they don't become in this unhealthy place. It kills them and it kills the church. It's bad. So, let's not do that. How can we be more proactive in preparing congregations to receive persons that may be different?

And I think we have to understand that this only happened 60 years ago that women were ordained, right? Sixty years may seem like a long time, but it's really not a long time. Just thinking about the first crew of women that blazed these trails to where we are sixty years later, we still have some of those persons who were alive then now and still live in that baggage. It's hard to change mindset. It happens over time, not overnight. But I think we'll get there. Like with any issue. I mean, we had the same issue with slavery. We are having the same issue with, you know, other aspects of ministry. I think we'll get there, just, people need to be open. We say open doors, open minds, open hearts, but do we live it?

BM: Do you often interact with pastors outside of the United Methodist Church? If so, do you feel that they approve of your career decision and trust that you were called just as they were?

AF: Well, I've come to not care what people think. So, I do have a lot of interactions with others outside of the United Methodist tradition. It's funny, particularly when I meet those who are non-denominational or Baptist that are from those more conservative faith traditions and they say, 'oh, you're a pastor?', 'yes', 'well you don't look like a pastor.' Well what does a pastor look like? Is there some cookie cutter approach to what a pastor looks like? Am I supposed to be in these skinny jeans, have 2.5 children with a wife? I mean, what does that look like? So, I get a kick out of that. But I don't do this for their approval of others, I do this for their approval of God. So, I've come to really not care. I say

it proudly, 'yes, I am a pastor.' And it's up to you to deal with it, not me. I've already dealt with it, because I say yes every day. So, I'm unconcerned. That has come through years. The place I am at now was not where I was initially. I cried, there have been dark times, because I wanted to be affirmed, and then of course continued wrestling with my family. But I just had to come to this place of peace that 'God, you called me, work it out.'

BM: Is there anything else that you want to tell me about ministry or your experience?

AF: Accepting my call to ministry was one of the best things I have ever done. While through my teenage years and even through adolescence I just knew I was going to lead this power accountant dynamic presidency, CEO of a company, and that was great. But I think what gives me fuel and passion is being able to plant the seeds in young people now, because I didn't even know that this was a possibility. So, how can I begin planting seeds in young people, particularly young girls, to know that this is a path, a possibility? I think that's what gives me passion right now, that I can not only be a witness by my presence, but also begin planting those seeds. It's the best decision I've made. Some days it's good. Some days it's not good. But I don't regret saying yes, and I say yes every day, because it is a daily decision. That's it.

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Jenifer Gibbs Interview

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I interviewed Jen the very same day as Aleze, via Facetime. I was very encouraged and hopeful that these interviews would be interesting and beneficial to me in my journey through this call. Jen did not disappoint.

Brooke Mayer: When did you first feel your call to ministry as a career?

Jenifer Gibbs: So, Brooke, I was an educator and anticipated being a lifelong educator. I'm the daughter of educators, the sister and sister-in-law of educators and public education was really my thing. So, at about, let's see, how old was I? I was well into my thirties. I was working for the department of education doing consulting work and loving it, but I was restless, really restless, and I couldn't figure that out. And so, my home church is here in Indy and I was invited personally to do a ministry discernment class, which I understood to mean we were discerning how to best use our gifts for God. I was a baby Christian still by most standards, and it was a 6 to 9 month process, this discernment class. It was beautiful enriching. So, I went in thinking I would discern which ministry and I came out discerning a call to ministry, I didn't know what ministry, but the call was very clear. It was clear through other people, through this group, through my prayer life. I fought it for a while. So, when I went to seminary I knew I was called to vocational ministry, but I didn't know what that meant. So I went to seminary not knowing, that's how it happened.

BM: Did you receive any backlash from family or close friends when you let them know you were considering going into ministry? If so, how did things play out and how did it affect you?

JG: Yes and no. I did not grow up in the church. My mom and dad both grew up in different traditions, but then did not take us to church. What was really intriguing is, my family when I told them this, this sense of call, they both were like 'oh yeah, totally see that in you'. And I was like, 'well that's interesting'.

Many of my friends do not believe women should lead in ministry. Though I'm from Leo, the house I grew up in is in Grabill. My neighbors are Amish. So, there was just a sense from those folks that isn't actually Christianity. I mean, that's how far it goes. So, if you're a woman feeling called to lead, even if you're not preaching, at best you may be a children's minister, but beyond that. . . So, there was just this subtle disapproval from a wide circle of my longtime friends. My brother disapproved because I was in the midst of a different master's degree. I was earning a master's in adult education and institutional change and he thought it ridiculous that I would then work towards another degree. So, not so much about female leadership.

BM: Are there passages in scripture that were concerning to you when you came to this call?

JG: Well, I mean all your normal suspects. I don't need to name them for you. But what's interesting to me, Brooke, is I did not understand . . . you know, I attended church with friends all the time growing up. I'm in a very conservative community, and when I was discerning call, I determined I should not preach or lead, because it was in me, and I did not know it was in me. And so, what's interesting is, I wrestled with scripture, all the normal suspects, and tradition as a person who was not largely churched. I mean, I came to Christ 3 or 4 years prior to that. So, what's interesting, this is a fun, short story. While I'm wrestling, this colleague in seminary says, 'We need to go have a talk about this.' So, we went out for a beverage and he laid out 4 scriptural understandings of women in ministry ranging from 'they should never speak in the public forum' to 'women should preach and lead'. And then he explained to me why he believes that scripturally women should preach and lead. And so, I married him. He's my husband. He

was not at the time, he was a good friend at the time. But he's the one who, upon two hours of scriptural discussion and probably one of the more conservative, theologically, persons in our graduating class. His adamant understanding of scripture and the depth with which he presented it allowed me to claim in ways that I had not been able to do on my own. So I married him, I mean I think that's perfectly reasonable.

BM: That's a great story, I'm glad you shared it with me. So, you kind of answered this already, but has your understanding of these scriptures changed over time and if so how?

JG: Yeah, I mean I think, I'm not going to be saying anything you've not heard or don't know, but I think historical context matters. And there's probably only one where the context still isn't fully clear, but it seems to be particular to that context because in the next book by the same author it's different. And so, I think for me when you look at the Canon from beginning to end the example of women in leadership is overwhelming. The first preacher of the good news is Mary from the tomb. There's no way around that. And so, you know, the leadership of the early church of women in everything from the administration of it to the leadership of it, so when we look in these particular contexts it feels like cherry picking out of a historical context as opposed to a view of the Canon from beginning to end.

BM: Did you choose to enter this denomination because it aligned with the views you hold about scripture, tradition, etc. or were there other reasons you became involved in the Methodist Church?

JG: Yes and yes. So, my life fell apart at 27. I had attended Methodist churches with friends off and on growing up. It felt very natural to me and when my life fell apart I had a very hard time finding a place to land in the churches I was actually attending. So, I went back home to the Methodist church and it was there, you know we Methodists we love grace, it was there that the grace was abundant and I was healed. So, when I went to seminary I didn't know much about Methodist theology necessarily or Methodist tradition or Methodist understanding of scripture. By about year two of seminary I thought,

'wow, I am really Wesleyan'. I mean I am deeply Wesleyan from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head and I didn't know that. So, I came to realize that that was just sort of who I am. And as time has gone on that has proven true over and over and over again. So, I landed here by accident.

BM: Do you feel that the decision to ordain women is one that all denominations should make? Why or why not?

JG: I have a hard time with the word should, because I think much of scripture is not prescriptive. So, I don't think I can say should. I think I can say, at this point in my life, I feel that it is deeply Biblical. That if we are going to interpret scripture consistently from one end of Canon to the other, it is hard for me to understand the holdout on that. In my experience, I'm one person and that limits, but it feels like scripture is inconsistently interpreted in environments where women are not allowed to speak. That's my perspective, I'm not in those environments, but I have lots of friends who are and that's my upbringing, right? So, I think, if you're going to claim scripture and you're going to interpret a certain way than let it be consistent and that would likely mean that women should be able to preach and lead. That's my thoughts on the matter.

BM: Is conflict on the ordination of women something you consider often?

JG: ALL THE TIME! And you know it's interesting because I served in . . . let me back up. I was an interim in Barrington in Chicago for 3 years. Okay? Chicago. Then I served in Bloomington, Indiana for my first appointment. Then I served in Broad Ripple in Indianapolis and now I serve on the east side of Indy. I am not one of the colleagues that's serving in a very rural, male driven area. Right? I'm serving in the big city, where diversity in leadership is true. (I'm going to shut my door on this one.) But, I'll give you a couple examples that are . . . Do you want me to be really blunt, Brooke?

BM: Sure, go for it.

JG: Okay, so my first ministerial breakfast in Bloomington, Indiana. So all the ministers go to his breakfast in a Christian school and I introduced myself and they looked at me and said, 'So you must be the children's minister' and I said, 'no, I'm the preaching pastor at X, Y, or Z' and they no longer spoke to me. I went to that ministerial breakfast every year. I had an experience in residence, in ministry, with our Methodist brothers and sisters. I was walking into worship early and someone said, 'right now it's only men in here' and I said, 'that's a bummer. We've been ordaining women for over 75 years. I think I'll come in'. I mean, it's just not going to work for me. So, I am the first senior woman pastor in the church I'm serving. The church is 177 years old and they also think I'm 12. So to be young and female, I am a middle-aged woman, I mean, I am peering at 50, but for whatever reason they think I'm both young and female. The subtleties about being female leader are very real here. So, I had a key leader this year tell me, 'well you better be ready to defend everything you and your other female colleague do'. I said, 'is that because we're female or because we're young?' He didn't know what to say because he heard himself in that. Now, we have a great relationship. It was just a question, right? In that moment let's confront the reality of this. So, in subtle ways in not so subtle ways. I have dealt with. . . I mean I had an older gentleman pat my behind while I was robed with the stole and the cross in front of the chancel area. I had a gentleman who regularly grabs my arm and won't let me pass until he decides. So, I had to have a very hard conversation with him. You don't get to do that. That's not how we're going to play together. So, that will end now and we will be respectful. So, it's very present. Doesn't mean it's not worth it. I have women colleague who say it isn't present, but it is present in the ways we interact with our district superintendents. It is present in the way we understand ourselves in meeting settings, conference meeting settings. It is present in the way who has voice and who does not have voice, who has influence and who does not have influence. Just as long as you're aware of that reality and continue to grow in that reality, it's very doable. But, it is very real, and there's kind of no way around that. I hope that doesn't scare you, Brooke.

BM: No, I mean it does a little bit, but I understand. You kind of answered this already, but is there anything else you want to say about how women in the United Methodist Church are treated differently than male pastors?

JG: Yeah, I answered that. There is still very much male privilege in the decision making process and the leadership process. I'll give you a very concrete example. In the 20 to 25 biggest churches in Indianapolis, one of them is led by a female. Now that stat was from two years ago and there was a new appointment, so you may be at two now. So, does that actually mean that there were no qualified females? Seems a little interesting. And I could give more examples, but that one's a very concrete example of decision making, who's at the table, who has voice, right? And that doesn't mean I think we're victims. I think we're still part of a changing dynamic. It used to be, what 90% male in this conference? I don't know the numbers, Brooke, but I think we're verging on 50/50. You know? So, that is a change and change is hard. So, I think we're still growing into that new reality and what that means. But appointments are seeking to reflect that change and I can tell you a couple appointments, this appointment season, are beginning to reflect that change. I, this appointment, this is a midsize, urban area and they appointed me. I am a test case. So, I just think it's about time and growth, and awareness.

BM: These differences that you see, would you say they are mostly from members of the congregation, from fellow pastors or from outside of the church?

JG: Differences in the way women are treated?

BM: yeah, compared to men.

JG: Yes, yes, and yes. All. I am at a hospital visit. I am wearing my pastor tag. I am wearing a jean skirt and black boots and a black sweater. This is a normal, weekly occurrence. I step into the thing and I get this *skeptical look* and eventually someone says, 'you're a pastor?' and I say, 'yep.' 'You're a lady pastor?' 'Yes I am.' 'Oh!' and then the reaction from there is very different. So, community members,

church members. I think eventually that difference goes away. I'm a year and a half in at this church and this church didn't know what to do with a woman pastor wearing heels and lipstick and preaching the word and audibly said that. I mean, one woman said to me, 'I prayed and prayed and prayed to God' this is a direct quote, 'give us anyone, give us a black man, give us a Hispanic man, give us anyone but a woman pastor.' and she said, 'and now I'm good with you.' Well that was earned, right? It's earned. So, I think it's just true. I think the longer it goes the less true the difference, the truth of the difference, the less it becomes. I've got good stories, don't I?

BM: Yeah, you do! I love it. Do you often interact with pastors outside the United Methodist Church? And if so do you feel as though they approve of your career decision and trust that you were called just as they were?

JG: I haven't as much in this setting, but in other settings a great deal. When I have interacted in Indianapolis, the circles I traveled in, yes. So, interfaith circles or those who play in the Methodist arena: Episcopalians, right? So, in those arenas, yes. In other arenas, like the ministerial breakfast or the ministerial association or conferences the answer is no they didn't approve. Did not approve and did not consider me called. I'll give you an example. This is a really . . . I've got good stories, Brooke. . . So, our contemporary service does not have enough money to keep a good leader. When I got here a year and a half ago there was no leader. They had just terminated the last leader and there was no one to fill it. So we had been walked through this a while. My husband has been filling in, also a pastor. And his student, a University of Indianapolis student, had been playing with us and wanted the job. My husband wanted to step down. All that to say, this gentleman does not believe that I should preach. He does not believe that I should lead. He comes from a tradition where women, when they are in the choir, have to sing with their back to the congregation. They may never turn around and face the congregation because that gives the impression of leadership. Okay, you with me? So he applies for the job, I preach every Sunday! It has been an interesting journey, and I hired him. I hired him because we talked through lots

of things, but now I have a staff member who doesn't believe that I should preach. Which goes against my better judgement, but he seeks to grow. He seeks to learn. He's humble. He loves working in an environment in an area that is diverse and my prayer life told me to hire him. But. . . Woah! I mean, it's not how you build a staff. You know? So, when I say yes you encounter it and do they approve of your call and leadership? No. But there are lots of areas where they do. Lots and lots.

BM: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your time in ministry or anything?

JG: No, but if you're called say yes, sister!

BM: Okay.

JG: Say yes. Good faithful folks passionate about the kingdom of God, passionate about the healing word of God, I hope you say yes if that's your call.

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Jill Howard Interview

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When I contacted Jill to set up an interview time she also invited me to come to her church and attend worship that Sunday morning. I am so glad I did because I got to see what her ministry there is really like and meet her husband and sweet little baby boy. She is serving in a small town church in Portland, IN.

She was in the middle of a sermon series on the 7 deadly sins for lent and her sermon on sloth was extremely applicable to me. I left their beautiful sanctuary feeling refreshed in my faith and renewed to do the Lord's work each and every day.

After the service we talked to a few members of the congregation who stopped her to talk and one of them mentioned her being appointed to a new church and that they would miss her. We talked some then about her situation and that she had been reappointed, after just a year, to another church mostly because her husband had gotten a job at the University of Indianapolis an hour away and they had trouble finding childcare for their son as well as just finding ways to be all together as a family throughout the week. She seemed content with this move and mentioned that they were looking forward to things being a little easier on their family. We then went to a Mexican restaurant in town for lunch, where we did the interview.

Brooke Mayer: When did you first feel your call into ministry as a career?

Jill Howard: When I was in college. So, to make a long story short I guess, I was Jewish before I became a Christian and throughout middle school and high school I was involved in Judaism, in the temple in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I'm from. Around my senior year of High School I became interested in Christianity because I was taking a class called Bible History. It was at a public school, but it was more

about the Bible as a piece of literature. We just read through and talked about some things, even some geography and archeological evidence. I got really interested in Jesus. So, by the time I was a freshman or sophomore in college I decided that this is what I believed and then at the same time kind of felt my call to ministry. Not right away, I wanted to be a professor, a PHD and teach theology or Bible. I love the academic parts of religion, but after an internship at Witham Hospital as a chaplain while I was in college and also I was hired to be on the youth staff at Saint Luke's while I was there. I said, "Okay, this is what I want to do." Being a pastor, you get to do a variety of things and I really like that. But even when I was in High School in my Jewish community I always felt called to lead in some way in the community. I would lead worship through singing or reading in the temple. So, I always felt called to lead in a religious community in some capacity. So, even then I kind of felt it, but I would say in college was when I was called, really.

BM: Did you receive any backlash from family or close friends when you let them know you were considering going into ministry?

JH: No, Nope. I got a lot of support. A lot of people wonder about my relationship with my family. My mom and I were the ones who shared Judaism when we were going through that. So, it was hard for me to tell her that I made this decision to be a Christian. I think at the time she was kind of sad, but wasn't ever angry about it, and now she's very supportive. She's kind of a sounding board for me because she doesn't know any of these people or anything going on. So I'm like, "Mom, I had a bad day in ministry" and she's very supportive in that.

But no, when I first said that I would say the response I got from my family was supportive but also I'm the weird one. I mean, my family, my parents are both doctors, my sister is a physical therapist. So, I'm the odd one out. I've got this whole other path, but it's fine. Everybody's been supportive and I can't think of anything. No negativity.

BM: Are there passages in scripture that were concerning to you when it came to this call?

JH: Yes. When I was looking into religion, Christianity, the church in Knoxville, I was attending a Church of Christ, not United Church of Christ, but Church of Christ, the ones that do not believe in instruments or. . . The one I was attending, I was going because the boy I was dating at the time was going there, and they didn't even allow women to make announcements from the chancel area. That was concerning to me as someone who, my mom's a physician. You know, I was raised, my sister and I, to be strong independent women and do what we wanted to do. As a Jewish teenager I was unaware that there were scriptures in the New Testament that were not favorable for women in leadership. So, [I] went in with that understanding, and then hearing about the fact that women couldn't make announcements or in youth group they couldn't start leading a song. Because they didn't have a guitar or anything it was just the tradition that one of the boys would start a song and the rest of the group would join in for the devotional time or whatever.

I went on a mission trip with that group after my senior year of high school to Mexico and one night we had devotions around the campfire and one of the girls tried to start singing. The youth pastor shut her down and said, "We don't do things like that around here." So, after that in the dorm that night all the girls were really distraught and throwing these scriptures around. I thought, "Are you kidding me? You all believe that you as women cannot do certain things because of what these scriptures say?" They were particular looking at the ones that say women should keep silent in the church and should never teach over a man, those particular ones. So, I had to really wrestle with that and had for a long time to think, "if I'm going to be a Christian does that mean I have to believe that?"

When I was in college was when I started to get into the Methodist denomination. One of the reasons I was interested in that was because they ordain women. We still have some challenges to overcome, but they respect women in leadership and women as pastors. Hopefully it's getting better all the time. So,

those were definitely concerning and I had to wrestle with that as a person struggling with my own faith to see what those meant and what that means.

BM: Has your understanding of those passages changed over time? And if so, how?

JH: Yeah, definitely. I think education is the key because for me, again as someone who didn't really know anything about the New Testament or texts like that, hearing that, as someone struggling with my faith, I didn't know anything about it. So, once I got into college and started studying, academically, religion and Bible and the context of these scriptures that's when it really made sense to me to say, "Hey, these texts are written to a particular group, in a particular time." In the ancient world women didn't have the same value as they do today. They were seen as property, as objects, unclean, whatever it was. So, these texts had attachments about what women should and should not do in the assembly. Yeah. I didn't like that that was ever that way, but there are still places in the world today where it is. That shifted my understanding completely because I thought, "okay, these are written for these people at this time for this reason."

At the same time you have texts throughout the gospels where Jesus is sending women out, having women as followers. Women are the ones who experience the risen Christ and the disciples listen to what they have to say even though they may not believe it at first. Women, especially in the gospel of Luke, play a huge role in what Luke is trying to accomplish as a writer of a gospel. So, those kinds of things really opened my eyes to the strength of women in scripture as well as ways we might be challenged about the role of women. And also, Paul himself we give a hard time for demeaning or belittling women sends women out to preach and lead groups. I think a lot of denominations that don't affirm women in ministry tend to overlook those facts and those texts, those places Paul does affirm women. Again, just me studying it and understanding it and context was really important for my understanding of those scriptures.

BM: You answered this a little bit already, but did you chose to enter this denomination because it aligned with the beliefs you hold about scripture, tradition, etc. or were there other reasons that you became involved in the Methodist church?

JH: I think when I was getting into Christianity I wanted a denomination that did ordain women. That was number one. I knew that if I were to become a Christian I would not become involved in a church where women could not hold leadership positions and were seen as equals. That's probably what drew me to Methodism at first. Also, their understanding of scripture is that we have scripture, reason, tradition, and experience to help us shape our faith but also how we read difficult texts. So, in light of that being a Methodist means you use everything you have to understand your life, your faith, and the Bible. Not that we're spoon-fed this information, we're expected as Methodists to see the whole picture. So, that drew me to it also. And of course our understanding of grace, prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace I think really grabbed ahold of me as someone who was coming from a different religion. The idea that God was at work in my life before and then there are moments where we realize that and we move forwards onto perfection in our lives and are always working on ourselves, that drew me to it also.

BM: Do you feel that the decision to ordain women is one that all denominations should make and why or why not?

JH: Yes. Definitely. I think that women have just as much, if not more, to offer in leadership in churches. In fact, most Protestant churches now have mostly women in the pews. Sometimes women are the ones who oppose women in ministry the most, which is ironic to me, but I think women offer many gifts and different leadership styles. One example I can use is when I was an associate pastor at a larger church my senior pastor was an older white male and we worked well together. But I noticed after being there a while that certain people would come to him for certain things and certain people would come to me

for certain things. Obviously they saw there were particular things they wanted to discuss with him and there were particular things they wanted to discuss with me as a women. I think that that really does the church a great deal of good, to have those perspectives not just with age, but with gender, race too if possible, but absolutely. I think the denominations should open their eyes to what our Bible is and what it's really about. It's not just nit-picking those scriptures, but it's a way that we can learn about God's story and how God continues to shape our story and that involves women. I think that they're missing out if they don't. Simple as that.

BM: Is conflict over the ordination of women something you encounter often?

JH: No. I haven't had a lot of problems with that. When I was a pastor in Morgantown, the town of 900, there was a Baptist pastor in town who was really opposed to women in ministry and two pastors before me at that church and then there was a man for 6 years. The comment that the male pastor got from the Baptist pastor was, "It'll be good to have pants back in the pulpit" is what he said. So then when I came it was just . . . he walked in my office, looked me up and down and said, "Are you the secretary?" "No, I'm the new minister here, how can I help you?" he said, "You're a bit young aren't ya?" I thought this guy's completely . . . he knows who I am, you know? But from parishioners I had I think at that church maybe two couples leave because they had a woman pastor. They also thought that I was too young. "She's just too young" you know? And I wonder if they would have said the same thing about a young man, the same age as me. So that was. . . but you know, you just have to think, "okay". If you're going to think like that then you've got to find a place where you think you're going to be more comfortable or whatever. I haven't run into too many issues with it personally.

BM: That's one of the things that Jen spoke about too, that you're seen as young a lot of times as a woman, and even more so than you actually are.

JH: Yeah, cause I'm guaranteeing you that if it were a male, I'm 34 so. If it were a male that was, at the time, 30 who came to that church, that same church, they probably wouldn't have left because he's too young. Yeah.

BM: Within the United Methodist Church do you feel as though you're treated differently than male pastors?

JH: Yeah, by some people. The cabinet, the DSs, a lot of them are still Good ol' Boys Club. I had a District Superintendent call me sweetie in front of my parishioners one time. And he's not going to call my male counterpart something like that. There are times when I'm spoken to in condescending ways. An email I got, actually about Corey (her husband) taking the position at UIndy, from my DS that I think would have been different had I been a male, because he was, in my opinion, being belittling and condescending and making sure I was doing what I was supposed to do. That I shouldn't be spending my day off going down to Indianapolis to see my husband and things like that. You know, would you be telling this to somebody who's a male? I don't know! There's been conversations about, you know, you're going to have to decide who's job is primary. It's not the 1950s anymore where the male pastor works and the wife itinerates with him. So there have been some sticky comment situations I've encountered where they don't know what to do with a woman pastor whose husband has to follow her around and find work. Because it's a different world we live in now and I think as a church we're just still trying to catch up to that. So from the higher ups there have been some [problems]. I've also been treated really well and equally in a lot of situations. Also acknowledging though that we still have a long way to go. Even colleagues sometimes, they won't take you as seriously as they would, you know, a male. So yeah, there's some examples for you.

BM: If you do see these differences in treatment, is it mainly from members of your congregation, fellow pastors, or those outside the church?

JH: I have been fortunate where I haven't had a whole lot of different treatment from parishioners. I know a lot of my women colleagues have. I think I've been fortunate so far that I haven't had many problems. There have been things around, like my appearance. I get comments every once in a while that I think are inappropriate that they wouldn't say to a male. So those moments are uncomfortable from parishioners. Or comments like, "When are you going to have your next baby?" Like, really?! That's totally none of your business, you know what I mean? Especially since I'm your pastor. But aside from a few comments I've gotten from parishioners about being a woman clergy, I think I've been fortunate. Those outside that church, being in a small town, like Morgantown, I never really got any negative feedback, but it was definitely more of a surprise. Cause they don't expect to see me as the new pastor at the Methodist church in town. Just more shock and awe when I introduce myself in the community. There's more, "Oh, you're the new pastor?!" They assume they're going to get someone totally different, and they get me, and it's a shock. So there's been a little bit of that.

What was your other one? Congregation, outside the church, or . . .

BM: fellow pastors

JH: Fellow pastors. I would say there's still a little bit of sexism with the higher ups, and there are some that are really trying to work on that, in their defense. There are some that really are trying to get out of it.

BM: Do you often interact with pastors outside the United Methodist Church and if so do you feel that they approve of your career decision and trust that you were called just as they were?

JH: When I did the Wabash Pastoral Leadership Program, that Jen was in also, we had at least two . . . this was, I should say, a group of pastors from all over the state of Indiana, all different denominations. So, we had, I would say, at least two male clergy in there who in their tradition did not ordain women.

One was Missouri Synod Lutheran, and one was Southern Baptist. I think at first the Missouri Synod pastor was really skeptical and didn't really want to give us a chance, was really stand-offish. But I think the program itself opened up his eyes to the possibilities of callings for everyone and different ways to do ministry. So, I don't want to say he came around, but he definitely had a new respect for us.

I also did my clinical pastoral education with three Catholic men, young men who were studying to be priests. I never really felt like my call was taken seriously by them, partially because I'm a woman, partially because I'm not Catholic. So, it was a little bit of both I think. They just didn't have any . . . We were just totally on a different page. Them trying to understand their calling versus my calling it just didn't compute for them. But aside from that it hasn't been a really difficult time.

I know that, again back to the Baptist pastor in Morgantown, he would never . . . one of the reasons that community doesn't do a community Good Friday service with them for example is because there's been women in the Methodist Church. He would never allow a woman to be a part of a service like that. And that's really sad. There's another woman there now, in Morgantown, and she's dealing with a lot of the same things. She apparently co-officiated a funeral with him because the family wanted it. So, I don't know how that went over. Haha. But there are going to be parties like that in every community that are opposed to women. You just have to do your thing and they'll get over it.

BM: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experience in ministry?

JH: I think my husband texted me some good examples. So, yeah, the Baptist pastor also carried a gun around all the time and drove around in his convertible. So, he would preach against women clergy, but then he would do things like that. It was nuts. There was a guy we encountered outside the Colts game one time that had a sign, you know, and it said something really judgmental. So, I just said to him as we walked by, "God is love." He started saying something back to me and somehow I think I told him I was a

minister and said back to me, "That's not true! You're not a minister! Blah, blah, blah. ." and I was like, I shouldn't have said anything, but you know. No understanding in that.

There was a transgendered person that contacted me over email several years ago, this is a good one, when I was in Terre Haute. This is when I was an associate pastor. He reached out to me, he wanted to talk to someone. He at first called and he was asking how he would be received at our congregation because he was a man but he was really wanting to wear women's clothes. Okay, well, I mean if you attended here I would make sure that you felt welcome that you had a place to sit, you know, all this stuff. And then this evolved into an email conversation and it got really strange at one point. He was talking about how he was going to counseling to get surgery and how he was on these medications. So, at one point I said, you know, I really think you should go to a professional counselor because he was telling me all this stuff. So, I said, "I can listen to you and I'm here for like spiritual direction, but I'm not a professional counselor. I'm a pastoral counselor and what you're talking about is beyond my area of expertise." But it was obvious that he needed or wanted something, so after a while I was like, "can you, would you want to come in and talk to me, meet with me in person." Partly because I wanted to see if he was really in the area, because it was just getting really strange, really weird. So after a while I invited him in to talk to me a few times, he always said no. So, long story short, we had friends come through Terre Haute to see us, who were seminary classmates of ours and there was some comment made by my friend about another clergy woman in Atlanta who had been contacted by this person with a very similar story. I said, "oh really?" So, I contacted her and said, "Have you been contacted by this person?" and she said yes. It turns out, we believe, he was targeting young clergy women with this story. To this day I don't know what that situation really was or why he was doing it. But it was weird, we found out he had contacted this person, and there were several others that were in the same situation.

And there are lots of stories like that, like in the Young Clergywomen Project I told you about. People will call up churches with women clergy and harass them. They'll start saying things like, "I need to talk

to someone about my temptations” and they’ll start saying really inappropriate things. Come to find out they’ve called another clergy women. We’re all connected, we know, like we share this kind of stuff, that’s one of the reasons for the group. We make sure that we are keeping our boundaries and being safe and not putting up with that crap because we are targeted. We’re targeted like that. You know, a year or two ago in South Carolina there were threatening letters sent to clergy women and they were scared for their families, for their lives. That’s still happening today. Luckily I haven’t been in that situation, but there are people who have felt very threatened.

Another one was a guy in Terre Haute, who had mental health issues, but he was an older guy who came to me and said, “God wants me to talk to you about this or that.” It was very strange. It was again very condescending. “God has a message for you, from me and I’m going to tell you and you better listen.” At one point he was going to give me 5,000 dollars cash to do something with it. But I was like, I can’t take that money from you. He called me a sell-out. That I’d sold out to the higher ups, to the Bishop. I said, “No, no, no it’s not about that. I’m not a sell-out. I just don’t want to take 5,000 dollars cash from you. You need to donate it to the church or donate it somewhere else, but don’t give it to me.” And of course that never came across my senior pastor’s desk. He saw me as, you know, a young woman who was impressionable and I should do this.

I’ve also been called a Jezebel. Ha, There was a letter someone wrote to my senior pastor in Terre Haute saying something like, “That Jezebel that you’ve got preaching there . . .” I don’t . . . that’s all I know about that. He didn’t tell me what else it said. But yeah, I think my overall experience has been better than a lot of others I’ve heard. One of the questions, last two churches, here and the church I’m going to, I’ve been their first woman clergy. So, I’ve asked them in my take in³, “How am I going to be

³ Take-ins are meetings with a pastor, the District Superintendent and the Pastor Parrish Relations Committee (PPRC) of a church. This is step number 6 of the appointment process. This meeting is in order to discuss the ministry needs of the congregation, the ministry gifts and experiences of the pastor, and the basis of the “match”. Unless major concerns arise it is understood that this will be the new appointment for this pastor. If the PPRC feels

received? Are there things I need to know about?" And this last one, they said they were excited about having a woman. Then here in Portland they said, "I don't think we'll have any problems" and my PPR [Pastor Parrish Relations] chair said, "But if anyone does I'll beat them." You know, something really funny and I thought, "Okay, I think we're going to be alright here." But I haven't heard any comments here about my gender.

When I was in Morgantown and I came from my take-in meeting the DS introduced me, introduced my husband, and said Jill is the minister. This older lady, who I came to love dearly, kind of touched my arm and said, "Oh, we like that." So, I haven't had any issues that have been huge. That's not to say I won't in the future. Do I feel like the Methodist still needs to work on how they treat their clergy women? Absolutely. You know, there are one or two women in the top biggest churches in the state. That's not right. There needs to be more. We only have a few District Superintendents that are women right now. We have several women that are in leadership roles, we need more. Even the issues with salary and how we're considered for positions needs to be looked at. And the whole issue with being itinerate and also honoring our spouses. We don't know how to be itinerate right now because, like I said, we've got a man and a woman who both want to work and have kids. I think adding children to the family has added a-whole-nother dimension. For me personally as a mom and a clergy person as you're trying to balance those things, I think women tend to want to do it all. So, we find ourselves having to set boundaries to be effective. So they're going to have to figure out the itineracy thing; if you're going to have women clergy you're going to have for the most part husbands who do want jobs and they want to have meaning as well. That's been a challenge for us and I don't think that we would have had as much trouble if Corey was the pastor and I was the spouse. So, they are changing our situation around greatly

this pastor is not a good fit for their congregation or other concerns arise they may put into writing a request for the appointment to be reconsidered. In this case the Cabinet and Bishop will determine if this appointment is to be reconsidered and if select another pastor for this appointment. (www.inumc.org/theclergyappointmentprocess)

because they're moving us to Indy. They shouldn't have placed us here in the first place, because they knew up front that we were going to struggle. We try, we try, but we're going to have to figure that out. So, being itinerate, women in big churches, large churches. Our clergy image I think we still have in our culture, you see in movies, is the minister is usually a white male, older. So, it[s] just really a whole cultural shift of how we view ministers that needs to take place. So, we're working on it.

I think that's all I would share. I can't think of any other crazy stories I have for you. I've heard much worse, but those are some weird things and weird comments like, "You're too pretty to be a pastor." Or "you're too young" or instead of talking about the sermon it's about the shoes I'm wearing. One of the reasons I robe, I don't think my predecessor robed at this church, one of the reasons I robe is because of my gender, honestly. I tell people that and . . . some people say, "oh, we really like that you robe" and I say "well honestly I wear it because you all would be talking about more of what I'm wearing than what I'm talking about." That really stops people in their tracks. They're like, "really? Maybe that's true." So that's something we have to think about too: Why we do these things, why we make the choices we do. A lot of people, clergy women when they're pregnant, have crazy stories as well, people touching their stomachs. I didn't have any of that actually. I was really surprised. I think that's all the stories that I could tell you.

BM: Thank you so much for sharing all that you did.

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Ann Glass Interview

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*Ann Glass is a retired United Methodist clergywoman who is a member and leads a Disciple class at -----
United Methodist Church in downtown Indianapolis. My pastor, Russ Abel, put me in contact with these
women and of all of them he said I needed to be sure to talk to Ann. She is his mentor and he thinks very
highly of her. I had great expectations for this interview of an insightful and inspiring woman and she
definitely did not disappoint.*

Brooke Mayer: When did you first feel your call into ministry as a career?

Ann Glass: Well I was probably about 16 when I felt a call to work in the church full time, but I grew up in an independent Christian church setting. So, I didn't even have any idea of ordained ministry. You know, my thought was I would lead a children's department or some traditional way of doing that. So, I went off to college and in my freshman year met a young man and got married and he was going to be a general Baptist pastor. So, my full time career would be being married to a pastor, and that was fine. It took me 11 years to finish my Bachelor's degree because I had children and that kind of thing. I finished my degree, I started at Oakland City College in Southern Indiana in the music department. I thought that would . . . you know, I was good at music, had a good singing voice and played the piano, so I started in music. We soon moved to the island of Guam, where my husband was from, and I enrolled in college. Finished there all but the last 13 hours and then we had a very bad typhoon on the island and our parsonage was leveled. It was during that time in prayer that we thought, "Well, now's a good time to go to seminary."

So, we moved back to the states to Louisville, Kentucky and we entered the Southern Baptist Theological seminary. After the first year I entered there as well, thinking it would help me make him a better pastor. In the mean time we had friends that we had made in the United Methodist Church nearby and they talked him into seeing the District Superintendent. He asked my husband if he was interested in doing a church. So, he start pastoring a United Methodist Church. In that process I started working with the youth of the congregation and took them, some of them, on a trip to youth annual conference. When I was there I met 3 clergewomen, who were already ordained and active. I was just, "Oh!" and during a communion service we had, one of the clergewomen served me the elements and I walked away from there knowing that's where I belonged. So, I walked in our house, put my bags down, my husband took one look at me and said, "You've decided to go into ministry haven't you?" It was that clear on my face, I guess.

So, we contacted the District Superintendent and he very quickly lined me up with a 3 point charge⁴. And it was interesting because that 3 point charge was one that my husband had pastored at one point. So, the District Superintendent, they had never had or experienced a female pastor, so he asked them if he thought that they would be able to take a female and the gentlemen said, "Yes, and if it's Ann Sablan (Which is what my name was then) we'd jump for joy." That was one of the 3 churches. That next Sunday they had a homecoming at one of the other 3 churches and 3 women from the other church attended that. I learned from them that they saw my going into ministry as breaking up a team, and they didn't like it. They just couldn't see that female going off and deserting her husband and her family. That was hard for them. We worked through all that. They all . . . it was like at the youth annual conference, Bishop Alton was there, and someone asked him what it was like for women in the church, and his response was, "It's always hard for us to take a woman to the staff parish committee, but within 6

⁴ 3 Point Charge means she was in charge of 3 churches under the same appointment. This is explained in greater detail later on.

months they all want to know how they can keep her." That was certainly my experience with those three churches and I was there for 4 years as I was going through seminary. They were just, I mean, they taught me to be a pastor. They were wonderful, wonderful, good people. The way it worked is, I had 3 churches, one I was there every week. It was supposedly the big church; it had 32 members. The other 2 had 30 members, but 7 people, 14 people came on a Sunday morning, because you'd go to church A and then you'd go to church B this week. The next week you'd go to A and then C and B was off, just holding Sunday school or something. So I talked to the District Superintendent and asked him if he could give me a handful of certified lay speakers and if I could train them and work with them, then they could be at the church I wasn't at one week. That would give them the same faces and people they'd be working with. So, when I left in 4 years, those other two churches were running over 40 people, the one way back in the country, and the other one was running over 40 and went on to go full time, you know. So, it got them started. So that was fun.

Then I moved from there, after graduation from seminary, which was 81'. I moved in at an associate position at University Heights, on the University campus of University of Indianapolis. So, I was the associate there for 3 years . . . 4 years? I look back on it and think that I was kind of fast-tracked. I probably have a very different experience than some women in the state, but I don't know. I just had a feeling of support from people, they took me in readily as an associate pastor at University Heights. We got along very well there and then at the end of that 3 or 4 year period I moved to an inner-city congregation. Of course, my husband was also appointed at a nearby church. So, that was always, we were a clergy couple. So, that was always kind of how you keep us together, you know, that kind of thing.

So we went to, he moved from an associate position then to a senior pastor role at East 10th Street and I was moved just south of there to the Calvary Church, which was on State and Hoyt. During that period of time, I was placed, I think as much as anything, to get conference funding for me. So, because that

point in time I was an Elder. So, I had to be paid a certain amount and for that little church struggling to keep alive, which we changed while we were there, they put some conference funding in and named me as the overseer if you will of another clergy couple, my husband, and two other pastors in the inner-city area. So, I would pull them together and we would try to coordinate work. It was kind of a high profile situation. In the meantime, I was working with, we had a real strong clergy women's group at that time. It happened that that year I was responsible for a couple of big events, one being, that year, in 1984, we had a big Bicentennial event. We were going to hold it at Santa Clause, Indiana. I was on the Commission of Archives and History, just a quirky change of events, I was moved to be the chair of that, and responsible for that Bicentennial event. So, I got a lot of press for that. It happened, it was to be held at the Santa Clause Campground, down my Evansville, and it happened that it was going to be held the couple of days when Bishop Leroy Hodapp, it was to be his first day as Bishop in Indiana. So, I got him to speak and all of that. We did a lot work to get that big event pulled off and he was there and I was present with him.

Then, the Bishop and the Cabinet called a group of us clergywomen in to have a special time of worship with them and interaction to try to make it better for women. Well, I had a key role in that. So, Bishop Hodapp got to see me operate and I don't know if I've been gifted with it or plagued, but I've had a kind of foreshadowing always of any major change in my life. One night, I woke up just, I was just anxious, just in a panic state from a dream. The Bishop had called and told me that he was going to appoint me as a District Superintendent. I was just aghast, I mean this was my dream. So, I get up, I'm sitting in the rocker in the living room, and the rest of the family finally gets up, and at 8 o'clock the phone rang and it was Bishop Hodapp's office wanting to talk to me, and I knew what it was. So, over the next couple of days, we finally work out a time when our schedules would work out, because I was scheduled to go to Chicago for a conference, that sort of thing. So, we got together and he asked me to be the District Superintendent in the New Castle District, which is over in the Richmond, Indiana area. There are about

5 counties over there, is what it was then. So, I was there for 6 years and while I was there, my husband and I went through divorce. He basically said to the Bishop when we met with him, "I'm a male chauvinist and I just can't handle this." So, it does a number on ya, breaks your heart and all that, but I was, I mean heavens, I was a District Superintendent. I could take care of myself. I wasn't caught in all that stuff that so many newly divorced women have to go through, but still, it was difficult. I can't say it wasn't. But we made it through that.

I was there for 6 years, which was at the time the longest you could be a District Superintendent. The system has changed since then, but during those years you could be a District Superintendent for a total of 12 years, but it had to be 6 years, and then you had to be off for 3 years, and then you could go back for another 6. So, at the end of 6 years he had to put me some place. Where do you put a female that's at the salary level of a District Superintendent? I was taken to the Southport Church to meet their staff parish committee. It was a 3 hour interview, which started with one gentleman saying, "Well, you know we've told the Bishop that we're at least 5 years away from being able to handle a woman." Cause all the big churches that were going to be open were sitting around thinking, "Ugh! We'll get that woman!" So, I said, "Well, I think we need to talk about that, because as I understand it I am appointed to be your new pastor. So, we need to talk about how we can work through that." Three hours later they agreed to give it a try. And from what I know, I mean, the man that said that stood up at my goodbye reception and said I was the best pastor they'd ever had. So, you know, you go from there to there. We did some really great work there, great people.

I was there for 4 years and then Bishop Woody White had come in by that time. I had been the chair of the delegation to general conference probably twice by that time. The year I was appointed to be a district superintendent in the New Castle District that was announced just before general conference. And that was the year that we elected delegates to go to general conference. I think because of the publicity and everything, you know of . . . well, people had asked the four years before. I had to get up

on the floor of annual conference because people had to ask could I be a delegate. The Bishop ruled that I couldn't be at that point because I hadn't been ordained an elder yet, I was just ordained a deacon, which is what we call commissioning now. So, I had just the first step done and he said only traveling elders can do that. So, anyway, that kind of thing had been the mix for 4 years, but once I had been appointed as a district superintendent, you know it was such, everybody was just wonderful, you know shaking my hand, and . . . it was almost too much. It really was good. So, every year I went to general conference I was elected to chair the delegation, which means you were the very first clergyperson elected to go, then you chair it. And I was so green I had no idea of the politics involved. I learned a lot that year.

So then, at Southport, had been there, had just been to general conference, and met Woody White, and had worked with our delegation. When you chair the delegation to general conference you're also the representative on the Jurisdictional Committee of Episcopacy. That group of people tell Bishops where they're to be sent to serve. So, I was involved in Bishop Woody White being sent here. Let's see, I had been serving at Southport then and when the opening came for the Bloomington District, Woody called me and asked if I would go down. So, I'd only been at Southport 4 years, but it had always been my take on it that if the Bishop asked you to go someplace you go.

So, I had to say goodbye to those good people and went to Bloomington district and was there for 3 years. In fact, I was chair of the cabinet at that point when we sent another gentlemen to Columbus First Church, to be its pastor. That take-in didn't go well for him. I will swear to this day that he tanked it on purpose because he didn't want to go. Haha. Anyway, so it was vacant and I can still remember Woody pushing a note across the table to me while I was chairing the meeting that said, "I think you'd make a wonderful pastor for Columbus." Of course, I know now that he wanted . . . you know a Bishop always has to think on a broader picture, and he wanted me to go to Columbus First because he wanted my district open so he could put a young man in there as District Superintendent. He needed to elevate that

young man, because he wanted him to be Bishop someday. God didn't work things out that way because he died a few years after that. But that's the politics of the church.

But I had a wonderful time at Columbus. I was there for 3 years. Bill and I bought a wonderful old house built in 1874 on a two and half acre spot, had a barn behind it and everything. It was just a beautiful old house, two story brick. Oh! It was just so much fun to live in and the people were wonderful, just wonderful. I mean they were welcoming to me from the get-go. I mean, all I had to do was walk in and tell them some of the things I had done in churches before and they were so just so excited. They thought I was Moses coming to save them. Haha. We just had a great time. Then I left there because I didn't have a thick enough skin, and not enough gumption. You know you learn. I had a young staff member who I can understand now, but living with it just got . . . living with it was tough. On a daily basis she was there, she and another, they were both in their twenties, and the one I could see now was a new mother dealing with trying to . . . she was leading the youth group, trying to deal with this baby, and a career and a husband, I think that that relationship probably wasn't doing well. She had that going on and suddenly, this woman comes in and works with the staff and members of the congregation, to change things. I took people up to Goshen, Indiana to talk with them about what they were doing there with a double campus. We could see that happening in Columbus! We could see taking over another area and doing church there as well as here. I mean, we just, we were going through a whole process of looking at ourselves and where we could lead the church and it was going fine with everybody. But then she would come into every staff meeting and question everything I did. We had a council meeting one night she just stomped out in tears that things were changing! I thought, "I don't need this."

Anyway, they moved me from there to Plainfield and I was there for 5 years and then retired. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience with a great group of people. We did some fantastic things there, I still get people from there that say, "oh! You did thus and so when you were here" and "Our church is changed because you did thus and so." When I went there, there was a 42 member administrative

board. How do you get anything done with 42 people to agree on anything? It was just craziness. So, we redid the whole structure and made the council a 13 member council with the senior pastor being that 13th member. But we based it on spiritual disciplines, really. When we were looking for people to fill those slots, were they givers, did they attend worship, were they people of prayer, did they . . . you know. And the congregation knew that's what we did, because every year we passed out sheets that said "Who are the people in the congregation that you see doing these things? Give us names." And those were the people we tapped on to get together. So, it changed the whole spiritual dynamic of what you were doing. It gave a mission center to what you were doing.

But there again, that was a 3 hour interview taking me in. I never had short interviews going in to a local church, because they all just imagined that members would leave because there was a woman coming in. They were scared of what would happen to their church. That's really changing, but I can tell you a story of trying to take a woman in to a church and they wouldn't even let her in the door. But I learned it wasn't just because she was female, it was because they knew her and had heard things about her ministry. So, they'd made up their minds, that if that was who I brought they wouldn't even let her in the door. So, that went south. So, I learned a lot about how church accept and don't accept women. Some of us are our own worst enemies. Some have left ministry that just didn't want to put up with it anymore. Some of the women that I came in with, that were here before I was, have left. I know of one who pastored here in town in a large church that went into what we call an appointment beyond the local church and she was told by the Bishop and cabinet they would not offer her another church. Now the Bishop can't . . . I mean the Bishop has to appoint you if you're an elder. They have to appoint you to a church as long as you have the credentials. Nothing had happened to have her credentials removed, but that particular group of men on the cabinet decided that she would not be given a church where she would be the senior pastor and have any male associates because she didn't know how to handle them, deal with them. She charged a district superintendent with harassment. She had two different male

associates that she asked to have moved because they would say things like . . . oh, they would call her husband her better half, things like that. Any feminist anything, she would jump on it. Right or wrong, I was never that kind of person. I didn't jump on every feminist little wagon. I had one person tell me that I said, this was in my early, early life, I said, "I'm not a feminist." And she said, "Yes you are! You have to be a feminist. You're a female clergy person. You are a feminist or you wouldn't be there." And there's truth in that, but you can love the guys and put up with their banter because most of them don't mean anything bad. Sometimes it's just that they don't know any better. You can say things to help them along, but you don't judge them if you know what I mean, so that they feel judged when you call them out.

I don't know, I just feel like I've been on a fast track. Even though I had long interviews with churches we always just worked it out and moved on and did the work of the church. I got to spend 31 years, the best years of my life, doing that. I wouldn't take anything for it. I was the first female district superintendent in the state and . . . I don't know. I just feel like God has a hand in your life and when it opens up to you, you just go. That's what I've tried to do.

So I retired from Plainfield. Have had a wonderful time. I teach a disciple class here. We go here because this is my husband's choice. You know, he had to put up with me. I remarried, when I was in Southport. It took me 5 years before I even thought about life again, but I paid a group called Together to introduce me to 12 men over a 4 year period of time and Bill was the 3rd one I met. It was just like, we met for lunch and we were still sitting there talking at 4:30 and got in my car and drove downtown to Indianapolis and walked around the streets. It was December, so it was Christmas time. We had dinner together and then I had to leave to go to a choir party. About every day after that we were together some part of the day. So, that was December, we were married in July. It has just been terrific. He's kind of a backseat person in the church, you know? "Don't ask me to do anything." Haha. And that's alright for him and it's alright for me. But we love this church, the ministry here is outstanding. Our pastor here

is from Great Britain and we've made, Bill and I, have made trips to Great Britain, I don't know 5 or 6 times. We've been to Ireland and Scotland and around, Germany and Austria and the Netherlands, Italy, Spain. We got to do some really great things in retirement.

Any specific questions? You know I've just rattled on and on and on.

BM: Haha. You're fine. Did you receive any backlash from family or close friends when you let them know you were considering going into ministry?

AG: nuh uh. Not from my . . . my father probably just kind of raised his eyebrows a little, but no really backlash from any of them. They were all real supportive. The only backlash, I guess you could call it, was from my divorce. I mean, that had to do specifically with my being in ministry. You know, I was no longer that little help-mate that was there every week hanging on everything and being a part of his ministry. I had my own ministry, and now that he was a pastor and I was a district superintendent, in fact he had been appointed to a church in my district. That wasn't good. So, you know, the male chauvinist thing came out. He ended up marrying one of his parishioners, that he wasn't having an affair with. Haha. Yeah, I can laugh now, it wasn't funny then. And he's had a hard life. He went ahead, I wasn't going to say anything to cause him problems. I loved him terribly, and he was the father of my sons, I wasn't going to . . . you know I could have taken him to court for fraud and all sorts of things. But it wasn't going to do the church any good at all or relationships or anything. But he continued in ministry, married Barbara and then they were divorced in like 3, 3 or 4 years. He ended up moving to California and met a wealthy woman out there and married her, and then they were divorced. But he did retire from United Methodist Ministry and I think was probably an excellent pastor given all that. So, anyway, that would be the only backlash, and that was a pretty big one.

BM: Were there passages in scripture that were concerning to you when it came to this call to ministry?

AG: No. Because for me, there are so many passages in scripture that speak of women who are in ministry with Christ, and when you look at the early church, women that worked there. I don't have trouble with scripture. I have trouble with how the church has interpreted it. Yeah. No, there's too much in there that would indicate all persons are called to be filled by the Holy Spirit and get out there with the passion to tell the Gospel story. Even Peter spoke of Joel in Acts, "Old men will dream dreams, women will prophesy." There's too much in there that indicate it's okay for us to do that. Yeah, too much.

BM: Has your understanding of passages changed over time? Or I guess, how did come to that understanding of scripture? That it's okay for women.

AG: Um, well I guess you'd have to say in the church I grew up in, you know, we were taught that women could not be pastors. I remember hearing that at church camp that I went to every year and was touched by. It was a Christian camp, not a United Methodist Camp. When men are called by God, they become pastors. When women are called by God they become musicians, or children's directors, or pastor's wives. That's what you do. So we were all looking for who was the pastor we were going to marry, you know? In that respect it wasn't scripture so much as what people were telling me. It's what they were telling me, "This is the way it is." So, that had to change in my mind and heart. And so when I was, when I got in touch with United Methodist clergywomen who were doing the work I thought, "oh. Well, I guess somebody does look at that differently." But it wasn't scripture. It was the people that were telling me what was right and what was wrong.

BM: Did you choose to enter this denomination because it aligned with the beliefs you hold about scripture, tradition, etc. or were there other reasons you became involved in the Methodist Church?

AG: I felt at home here, from the get-go. We were very active in the general Baptist church when we started with the United Methodist Church, but it was just like coming home. The mission and ministry of

the Methodist Church was exactly where my heart was. Now, between you and me I struggle with the United Methodist Church today and its vision on gays and transgenders. I just hurt for our church and see a whole group, a whole bunch of our church that says, "That's wrong!" And I disagree with that. I disagree wholeheartedly. I believe Christ came to save all people and our social principles recognize that, but our book of discipline says we can't marry them, we can't . . .you know. So, I struggle with that now, and we'll see where that all comes out. I can't see that it'll be anything other than a split. They may come back and have a general conference that says that we can leave it up to each church, or to each region. Cause Africa's not going to change its mind. Heavens, we've sent our good missionaries over there all these years to tell them how terrible it is and they believe it. So, they're not going to change their mind and they're becoming a larger and larger and larger part of our general conference vote. And the South East jurisdiction's not going to change its mind. So, I can't see anything . . . we tried a number of years ago there seemed to be a push to kind of regionalize the church, make it more regions that set their own book of discipline. If we could go to that maybe there'd be some hope. This church, I mean, one of our dear, dear parishioners is Amber and she's as trans as you can get, you know? But she's been accepted here and loved and this is her family. We have gay persons and it's a wonderful congregation with an acceptance to everybody. You know you've got some who don't like the homeless sitting here on Sunday morning. "We used to have a table we could sit at and now they're every place!" I think, "Thank God!" Haha. You know, but you're going to deal with that. We're human beings.

BM: Do you feel that the decision to ordain women is one that all denominations should make and why or why not?

AG: Well sure. You're cutting off half of the population that God should be calling. Yes, they need to open up to that. Of course, I graduated from Southern Baptist, and many of my colleagues, I came through as a United Methodist, but here were all these Baptist women going through, and talented women, talented women. I heard them preach and you know, they had no chance in the world or being

given a church. Of course now that seminary isn't even recognized by our university senate. After I left there they refused to teach United Methodist classes and that kind of thing. The Southern Baptist convention went really, really conservative and they're not even in the university senate anymore. I did my doctorate at McCormick in Chicago. That was a really good experience. I did it on church revitalization and spiritual formation and that was a tremendous experience. The University of Indianapolis gave me a doctorate in divinity, wasn't that sweet of them. I remember saying to the fella that talked to me about it, "I've already got a doctorate." Haha. Duh, it was just a nice honor for them to do that. Yes, to answer your question. They would be much better off if they would open up. Now the Disciples of Christ have opened up. Our associate pastor here is an ordained Disciple pastor and she has done marvelous things with our family and children's program. Oh, she's tremendous. I don't know how long we'll get to keep her. And our pastor's wife is an ordained Disciples pastor, although she is now pastoring a United Methodist congregation. The Garden, you may or may not have heard of it. It was connected to Saint Luke's and they worship in Beef and Borgs, she's the senior pastor there now.

BM: Is conflict over the ordination of women something that you encounter often?

AG: I did when I was going through it. You know, as you're a woman in the active ministry. In the United Methodist system you are appointed, but it's in consultation with the local church. So you have to meet with the staff parish committee and, whether you're male or female, you have to convince them you can work together. That's always a trying time for any pastor going in there. But Bishop Alton was right, if you get your foot in the door, if you're just you, if God's called you it's going to work out. So yeah, there's that conflict, just because they're afraid. They're afraid a bunch of their members will leave and they'll be there holding the bag to do everything, pay for everything, and they're just afraid. But when that doesn't happen, it's okay.

BM: Within the United Methodist Church do you feel as though you were treated differently than male pastors?

AG: Well, within the local congregation at first you're treated differently. Within the appointment system you're definitely treated differently. I trust that's changing, but in my 31 years of experience district superintendents were hesitant to deal with women, just because they know it would be hard to sell them to a congregation. I mean, I sat around the cabinet table 3 different times, once in New Castle, once in Bloomington district and then after, the year I retired was when our conferences merged. So, Bishop Coyner had 10 superintendents in the north and 10 in the south and suddenly he had to get down to 10 superintendents for the state. So, he called me in as a retired person to be a superintendent for a 6 month period of time just to make things work. So, 3 different times I sat around the table and never did a superintendent want to take a woman in. But, it's changed at the point that they didn't have to and that . . . they're just more open I think to the process now. We have a few more women there and they're capable women and the key, if you're a clergy woman. And I understand maybe you're thinking that might be where life might lead you.

BM: yeah, maybe.

AG: The key for the clergy woman is just to be open to serving wherever you're sent and when you do a good job that follows you. To do it with some grace and discipline and keep your nose clean. Spend a lot of time in prayer and it works out for you. That's about all I can say.

BM: You talked about this some, especially within the congregation and then with appointment, but would you say that differences in treatment come mainly from members of your congregation, from fellow pastors or from those outside the church.

AG: Fellow pastors, sometimes. Sometimes, fellow pastors, especially if they think you're receiving better treatment. And that's not just women clergy; it's women in any professional setting. It's easy for

a male colleague to say, "ugh, she just got that position because she's a woman." You know, "They needed a woman to do that." It's easy to say that kind of thing, because then you don't have to point the finger at yourself and think why you weren't selected. So, you just kind of have to, as the woman clergy, just take it all with a grain of salt. Most of them just love you to pieces. Some of my best friends are colleagues, male colleagues. They've been terrific to me. I've had a great time.

BM: Do you often interact with pastors outside of the United Methodist Church and if so do you feel as though they approve of your career decision and trust that you were called just as they were?

AG: Yeah, I think most of us have that experience. In an area there'll be a ministerial association in which different pastors in the area meet together for breakfast, that sort of thing. I was in that both in Columbus and Avon, Plainfield, when I was at Plainfield. We had a group that met around Avon. They were Presbyterian and Methodist and Disciples and Lutheran. We didn't have any Baptists in there. In most communities, my experience is that most Baptists stay to themselves. Because they just have a very set culture and way they do church, and it's very anti female. But among Presbyterians, and Lutherans, and Episcopalians, and Disciples, you know, they all receive women. So, we're pretty much all together. But it's really our good Baptist folks that have real trouble with it.

I had a colleague, a female, that pastored the Avon United Methodist Church for many years, Karen Devacher, when she came to town the little old Baptist church there on 36 has this big sign, you know that they change all the time and it made some negative comment about women pastors as she came to town.

(Their associate pastor, Melissa, came in and Ann introduced me to her. She asked me about my plan for ministry and said, "I think it's hard once you get that call to do anything else.")

AG: What was our last question?

BM: You answered it mostly, but just if you have anything else to say about other pastors outside the Methodist Church.

AG: oh, yeah. Well, just that it's their loss, but I understand. That's where they're coming from. They've got just a different view of theology and that's what they've got to live by. That's just their loss. So, where are you on your journey?

BM: I don't really know. I'm planning to intern with Cru. I'm graduating from Ball State this semester. So, I'm planning to intern with Cru and I'm kind of just taking it as a year to figure out where I'm going.

AG: Alright, as in Crew Carwash?

BM: No. Haha. It used to be Called Campus Crusade.

AG: Oh! Okay, oh yeah.

BM: It's a ministry on campuses. I'm involved in it now.

AG: So you're going to be doing that?

BM: Yeah, so I'll be doing ministry; it just won't be in a church, it's a campus ministry.

AG: There's all sorts of ways to be in ministry and if you like the campus setting, boy what an opportunity! Oh, you'll love that.

BM: Yeah, and I think it'll be a good opportunity just to try out different things too and figure out what I want to do going forward.

AG: So, how do you know Russ Abel?

BM: He's my pastor at my home church.

AG: Is he? Alright. He's, I love Russ. He's one of those colleagues I was talking about that I just love. He's just a tremendous guy and of course he chairs our board of ordained ministry now, so he's the one to tell you all the steps.

BM: Yep. Oh I know. Haha.

AG: He must think he must see a call in you. So you just have to . . . what kinds of things have you done in your church?

BM: I've preached a few times at my home church. Yeah

AG: Done a lot of work in the youth group probably?

BM: Yeah, I was really involved while I was there.

AG: Where was your home church?

BM: In Fort Wayne. Saint Joseph United Methodist.

AG: So you came from Fort Wayne to Ball State? And this is a Masters you're working on?

BM: No, it's my Bachelor's Degree.

AG: Okay, well, didn't take you 11 years. Haha. So, you'll be working as an intern. My two cousins did something similar to that when they graduated and one of them is now a pastor and the other one is just a good Christian person in his church and raising a family and all that, but they loved that period of time in their life. It can be very exciting working with college age students in their spiritual walk. Do you have any other questions?

BM: Just if there's anything else you want to tell me about your experience in ministry, I'd love to hear it.

AG: Well, other than I think it's just, sometimes I want to pinch myself. The experiences I had, it felt like I was in the right place at the right time, which gives me a whole appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit. I really struggle with thinking that God has a plan and it just all (comes in a straightforward way). I just really struggle with that concept. I come more from a Holy Spirit . . . you know you're called by God and if you're living in the present then you're going to recognize those opportunities as they come to you, on a daily basis. You have to be prepared to respond to them. The Spirit is the one that gives you the power to speak and the words to speak and you'll sit back and somebody will tell you some day, "you know when you said to me duh da duh da da." And you'll think, "Did I say that?" haha. You know, "It changed my life." Well thank God, God gave you those words to speak, but you just have so many opportunities in ministry that are just exciting and I, like Melissa said, if you feel a call, you're not going to be happy if you don't do it. If there's ever anything I can do to help you along the way, give me a call.

BM: I just might.

AG: Okay. Yeah, Russ called me back on the board. So, I'm back on the board. It's a great group to work with, but it's a body that credentials our pastors. So, you're making a decision on a person's life. So, a person can go all the way through seminary and you can say, "I just don't see it." It doesn't happen very often, but when it does it just breaks your heart. We're going through that experience right now with somebody and it's tough. You've got to make the judgement call, but you're saying that that person is capable and ready to pastor the people of God and it's a big decision. But if they're called, and they're diligent . . . It's a tough group, I'll tell you. If you don't do a good job answering questions on paper or can't express yourself in preaching . . . You want to protect the people in the pew too. And then you have to behave as a pastor once you are credentialed. I've had people that, you know you've got to talk to the board and say, "you need to talk to this person." If they do some really stupid stuff, then you just can't let them be out there in the ministry anymore. Doesn't mean they can't be forgiven and move on, but they can't fit the role of pastor anymore. You can't trust them. It's hard. I've had some awful good

churches that gave pastors a second chance on things. So, there are great churches out there too, but we have to behave. Otherwise, they'll have Russ on their back door. Haha.

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Interview Thoughts and Themes

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As these interviews came together as one final product I began to see themes throughout them and connection points for myself that were worth mentioning and expanding on. The following section includes these reflections.

Addressing those who disagree with your call

Each of these women came from very different backgrounds and at some point or another encountered those who felt that God does not intend for women to be pastors in the Christian Church. This is something that all women considering a call into ministry will most likely experience. From the stories these women shared, two main points stood out to me: 1) recognize where these people are coming from and listen to understand and 2) do some study yourself and develop your own understanding to enter these conversations in a more healthy way.

Aleze Fulbright mentioned (when I asked about how her understanding of scripture has changed over time) that she believes it is important to see these passages in the context in which they were written. This is something that each of these women mentioned, but Aleze went on to say that since she has realized this for herself she has made an effort to help rid others of what she calls the "ignorance" of this mindset. "I call it ignorance, and ignorance is not a bad thing it's just that you don't know. Yeah, I'm a cheerleader and a champion to rid people of ignorance." (Aleze Fulbright) This may seem like a harsh word to use in this context, but I believe she meant it in the kindest way. Ann Glass said something similar in her interview. She discussed a time when a woman called her a feminist and she said, "I'm not a feminist". She went on to say that there's truth in the fact that you sort of have to be a feminist in

order to be a clergywoman, but not in the way that many people think of what a feminist is. "You can love the guys and put up with their banter because most of them don't mean anything bad. Sometimes it's just that they don't know any better. You can say things to help them along, but you don't judge them." (Ann Glass)

The theme through both of these conversations was not to say, "I'm right, you're wrong, here's why". These women care about educating others in a kind and loving way that acknowledges the source or their concerns of the intentions behind their actions and addressing them. However, in order to do this we must be educated ourselves. My own experience with the context of scripture is outlined in my story, but these women shared some of their own insights that were beneficial to me as well.

Aleze brought up that all of these scriptures themselves were written by men in a society where women were not valued, which complicates our reading of in a much different culture today. Jen brought up the fact that the women were the first to arrive at the empty tomb and go out to share the good news. Jill pointed out that we often fault Paul for these verses that seem to be anti-clergywoman when he encourages women serving in ministry in other books. Ann talked about the way scripture has been interpreted playing a larger role in this context than even the scripture itself. Each of these things along with what I have studied on my own helped me to see how scripture needs to be taken in as a whole and examined in context rather than picking apart particular verses that seem to not fit the rest of the story.

Every person's experience (with scripture and those who hold a different view of it) is just as affected by context as the scriptures themselves are. This is important to keep in mind as we are studying them and discussing them with others. Being informed and recognizing the perspective of others, even if we disagree, is the only way we will have constructive conversations and encourage each other in faith rather than tear each other down.

Being a YOUNG Woman

Both Jen and Jill spoke about being seen as young in addition to obstacles of being a female pastor. This is one concern that many people have entering any career regardless of gender, but these women both seem to believe that women in ministry are seen as even more young than men in the same field, and in turn often seen as not as competent in their duties. There are many ways this could play out and a variety of reasons it may be happening in the first place. These reasons may include: the use of age as a “cover” for gender being more of an issue than they would like to let on, age and gender being compounded as a “double-negative” working against them, or some other reason entirely. It is hard to say without research in this particular area, but I have no doubt in my mind that the experiences of these women were affected by their perceived age as well as their gender.

Living outside the Norm

All four of these women spoke in some way about living outside of norm. Ann spoke about doing ministry in a different way than she grew up hearing about. The other three mentioned people being surprised to hear they are pastors. These three women expressing this same experience made it pretty clear to me that this is a consistent occurrence for clergywomen. It seems to me as if this is something these women have grown accustomed to, even if it is frustrating each time it happens. In these situations they talked about standing firm and explaining that “yes, I am a pastor.” Which is really all you can do.

The thing Ann Glass spoke about that was a little different was that she grew up hearing that women called into ministry should be children’s directors, musicians, or pastor’s wives and feeling a call to something different than that. Living outside of this norm that your surroundings have set for you can be a hard decision to make, but an important one if it is where God is calling you. Taking a step of faith may look like a strange decision to those around you; however, anything but choosing to follow God is

the wrong choice. It takes a strong person, but I can see in them that none of these women regret making that decision.

The Strength of a Clergywoman

These women are faithful servants of God, even when that is uncomfortable and difficult. Aleze spoke of saying yes to this call every day, even on days that make it hard to. Jen hired a man to be the worship leader of the contemporary service in her church who does not believe in her call, because she felt God was telling her to. Jill has had to withstand strain on her family, but has continued in her ministry. Ann has served in ways in the church that have required her to make tough decisions that impact other's lives. All of these women were involved at one time in a church that didn't recognize women as pastors. All of these women said yes to becoming a pastor despite this.

Each of these women's experiences show their undeniable strength. They have overcome adverse situations and followed where God has led. I don't know if these women consider themselves to be as strong as an outsider may see them, but I know that the strength I see comes from the Lord. They have been gifted and provided for in countless ways and their ministries are a testament to the loving and caring God they serve.

Finding Support

God is our chief source of support in life and ministry, but that does not mean he does not provide us with support through people as well. In fact, it was having 3 clergywomen serve her communion that led Ann to begin her own ministry in the first place. It is important, especially as a woman entering ministry, to find people who care for you and are supportive of the call that God has placed on your life. Aleze spoke of being that support for others and I know from this experience that I can consider each of these women to be a part of my support system. But regardless of where it comes

from (family, friends, a congregation) we must surround ourselves with fellow believers who trust that we are called.

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So where can I go from here?

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Coming out of these interviews I'm not sure I have any more real clarity about where my future is leading, but I have immensely more clarity about how my past has led me here and how it continues to affect me. I have become more informed and better understand not only the stance of the United Methodist Church, but the view of those who don't affirm women as pastors as well. The conversations I had with these women confirmed that this will no doubt continue to be a topic I have to discuss with people, and I don't have all the answers, but I have a few more now. That being said, this is where I'm at on April 28th, 2017. My views are not the same now as they were in January when I began this project nor will they likely be completely unchanged one year from now, let alone in five or ten.

Hearing the stories each these women had to tell and seeing them at their various stages of life, doing ministry, has shown me that no two people called by God work through all of that in quite the same ways. If I had grown up in the church Ann was involved in growing up I would have heard that I should marry a pastor and absolutely done that. Growing up in the church I did I heard that, if I was called, I should be a pastor and I was pretty sure I was going to do that. However, we aren't always called to follow the norm.

As I looked into scripture this semester, rather than being more sure that I agreed with the stance the United Methodist Church has taken on this issue, I found myself being more confused and skeptical of the decision my church made 60 years ago. As I outlined in my story, there are some passages of scripture that have become sources of encouragement to me. I see how they may be seen as for a specific time and not as relevant today. However, assuming that that is the case of these and

other passages that discuss women's roles seems problematic to base my career on if I'm not entirely sure. I see the other side now as well and it has left me in a tough place.

I am hesitant to say that I have changed my mind, because I'm not sure that I've really made up my mind. I recognize both perspectives and see both as valid, but I am starting to lean one direction. I've always held a "better safe than sorry" attitude towards life and this is no exception. I wonder if the view that I am leaning towards would be holding myself back, but I am beginning to see that that may be more because the society we live in values authority more than we should. The complementarian view of scripture is not that women are less than men, it is that men should be the ones to hold roles of authority within the church.

If this is the truth of scripture that I come to believe it does not mean that I am less than men or that I am not called. It just means that I am called in a different way than I originally thought. I don't know what that way would be, but I know that God is working, even as I write this, and that He has a plan even when I don't. Oddly enough, it is not my own career or role in the church that has me most concerned. There will be a role other than "pastor" for me to fill if I come to a complementarian view of scripture, and God will help me find it. I have no doubt in that. My concern lies in the implications this view could have on the women I know and greatly respect who are pastors or will become one someday.

These women I interviewed are clearly living out God's call. They are doing great things for the church and the family of believers and I have no doubt that God is working through them. They have no doubt in their minds that God called them to be pastors, and in all honesty I don't doubt it either. The greatest tension I feel is not from what scripture says, but in the disconnect I see between what it says and what I see right in front of me: the ministry of women.

I am not convinced from what I see in scripture that God intended for women to be pastors. That doesn't mean it isn't true or that I won't come to that decision at some point, but right now I'm not fully convinced. I am also not convinced that the ministry of these women is against God's will or unbiblical. These are women of God who are living out his calling for them. I don't doubt their call. We may end up holding different views about scripture and carry out our ministry in very different ways, but I will never doubt that they are living their lives for Christ and that He is working through them.

A helpful comparison was made to me by a woman I look up to, who holds a complementarian view. The decision of whether or not to ordain women is similar to baptism in that it is not a central truth of the gospel that determines whether a person is a Christian. Churches have differing views on baptism: full immersion or sprinkling, infant or adult, etc. While these decisions may be based in scripture and differ you would never look at someone who was baptized in a different way than you and say, "You clearly don't understand scripture and are not really following God" (or at least you shouldn't).

It would be easy for someone who holds an egalitarian view to say churches who don't ordain women are holding them back from living up to their full potential in ministry. It would be easy for someone who holds a complementarian view to say that those who do ordain women are ignoring passages of scripture that seem straightforward on this issue. If I learned anything from this project it is that that does not have to be the case. If I come to hold an egalitarian view I can respect those who are complementarian and see the ways that they do value the women serving in ministry, just without the same authority as men. If I come to hold a complementarian view I can recognize that the women serving as pastors and people who believe they should be are not ignoring scripture, just understanding it differently.

This project and my expectations for my own understanding of scripture and my call didn't exactly go as planned. However, I am much more comfortable in the not knowing for having done it. No

matter which way I end up viewing scripture (egalitarian or complementarian), I know God will be with me and so will my loved ones, even if we disagree. This has been the hardest part for me to accept because I am a people pleaser. So, to those of you reading this who are people pleasers like me, and especially those women discerning a call to ministry, know that no matter what, God will be with you. If you are diving into scripture (even the hard ones), spending time in prayer, and talking to people who know you well enough to see your God given gifts, it will all work out. Not everyone will agree with your decision or respect it, but some people will. Enough people will.

I would like to leave you with a few words of encouragement as a benediction:

Christian author, Lisa Bevere, says in her book, *Without Rival*, "If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, rest in this. You, my beautiful friend, are not that powerful." When it comes to important decisions in life there is only so much "figuring out" that we can do. There comes a point when our only option is to rest in the Lord's love and grace and rely on Him to reveal what is important. If you are seeking to live for God you're in good company; that is what He wants for you as well.

Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. . .

The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.

Exodus 14:13a, 14

Appendix A: Interview Questions⁵

1. When did you first feel your call into ministry as a career?
2. Did you receive any backlash from family or close friends when you let them know you were considering going into ministry? If so, how did things play out and how did it affect you?
3. Are there passages in Scripture that were concerning to you when it came to this call? (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, etc.)
4. Has your understanding of these passages changed over time and if so how?
5. Did you chose to enter this denomination because it aligned with the beliefs you hold about scripture, tradition, etc. or were there other reasons you became involved in the Methodist Church?
6. Do you feel the decision to ordain women is one that all denominations should make? Why or why not?
7. Is conflict over the ordination of women something you encounter often?
8. Within the United Methodist Church do you feel as though you are treated differently than male pastors?
9. If you do see differences in treatment is it mainly from members of your congregation, fellow pastors or those outside the church?
10. Do you often interact with pastors outside of the United Methodist Church and if so do you feel as though they approve of your career decision and trust that you were called just as they were?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your time in ministry?

⁵ Questions submitted to IRB. Project was determined exempt from IRB approval.

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